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MARRIAGE IN THE HOUSE

versus

MARRIAGE IN THE CHURCH

Claims of the Native and the English ideas

by

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PREFACE.

That English marriage is a kind of marriage for the people of England, and not an exclusive *Christian* form, ought to be well known, not only to the European Christian Societies out here, but also to the Europeanized Natives in Lagos and the Interior who can hardly distinguish between the claims of what are best known to them as *House* and *Church* Marriages.

Much ignorance has been shown on the question of celebrating marriages in the House and in the Church; and without studying the English idea, and its position to the christian law, many Native *Converts* of European Churches maintain that marriage of two christians other than that celebrated in licensed places of worship is "*Unchristian.*"

An effort is here made to show the claims of single and plural marriages, and of marriages celebrated in the House and in the Church.

April, 1921.

The Author.
Lagos, Nigeria.

SINGLE & PLURAL MARRIAGES

English laws of marriage are only to be found in the English State laws. The Englishman marries according to his state laws. He takes a wife from the State and he is not permitted to marry again until the death of his wife or until divorce has been procured; on the contrary he is held for *Bigamy—a crime recognised by the law* :—

Concubinage is a word meaning a state of living together as husband and wife without being married lawfully; it is therefore the very opposite of Legal marriage, although it is no crime. A man who takes two wives together; one being under the State laws and the other under the law of Nature, is not guilty of any crime. The English people therefore are polygamists by Nature. *e. g.* (i) One *lawful* wife and one *unlawful* wife are two wives.

(ii) One lawful wife and one lawful wife (after death or divorce) are two wives. Henry VIII., the First "Supreme head of the Church of England" married in succession: (i) Katharine of Aragon. (ii) Anne Boleyn. (iii) Jane Seymour (iv) Anne of Cleves (v) Katharine Howard (vi) Katharine Parr?

How many wives had he altogether?

The Englishman therefore is not a husband of one wife.

The African neither makes a *state-daughter* of his wife, nor marries such. The word for 'marriage' in Yoruba is *Igbeyawo* i.e. the taking of Bride, This happens when the Consent (*Ijohun*) of the parent, and the payment of dowry (*Idana*) have been effected. The husband is not required to procure a divorce or wait till

the death of his wife before marrying the other, if he elects to do so, and he has the means. Divorce is not permissible (c.f. Gen. 3. 12; Mark 10. 11 & 12; 1 Cor. 7 .39 & etc.) He has no law to encourage prostitution. All women are Wives. *No "women of the under world."*

The difference between the two is, while the wives of the Englishman are disallowed to live together, as was usual with the wives of many godly men we read of in the Bible, the wives of the Native are permitted to live together.

Jacob (Israel) married four wives together and none of them was his Concubine; he remained their husband, even as Christ is the Bridegroom, the Shepherd of his Flock. His flock comprises many folds—many Churches.

When we read of the genealogy of Jesus the Christ and when we read: "And I heard the number of them which were sealed; and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel" (Rev. 7. 4.) We must also remember that plural marriage is righteousness. The question: "*Is it better to marry than to burn?*" is clearly answered by St. Paul (in 1 Cor. 7. 2. i.e. Let every man have his own wife or wives!)

Marriage is no sin; "it is honourable in all." The nearer a nation's laws about marriage approach to the law of God the higher has the moral tone of that nation always proved to be.

Claims of marriages celebrated in the House and in the Church

In the Native Custom, after the consent of the daughter's parent has been obtained and the dowry paid, the bride is blessed by her parents before taken to her husband's house on the day fixed for Igbeyawo. The Church of Ethiopia honours marriage celebration with Christian rites performed in the house of the Bride's parent.

In Nigeria, the English Law provides that marriage may be celebrated in any licensed place of worship by any recognised Minister of the Church, denomination or body to which such place of worship belongs, and according to the rites or usages of marriage observed in that church, denomination, or body, provided that the marriage be celebrated with open doors between the hours of 8 o'clock in the forenoon and 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and in the presence of two or more witnesses besides the officiating minister; and that the minister who fails to go with the requirements as provided by the Ordinance shall be liable to two or five years penal servitude.

Now let us ask ourselves the rights of marriage in the House of the Lord? Is the doctrine to be found in the Bible? Were the children of Israel permitted to be celebrating marriages in the Temple?

In the New Testament we read that Jesus attended, or (as some have said) "adorned and beautified marriage with his presence" in Cana of Galilee. And that it was a marriage performed neither in the Temple nor in the synagogue but in the upper room of a private house.

Historians tell us: "Majority of Jewish houses were only one story high. In some houses an upper room is set apart for religious purposes; prayers are offered in it, circumcision and the rite of matrimony performed, the pass-over eaten, and the dead laid out"

"The ceremony is performed in the 'upper room' of private houses. The betrothed pair stand under a canopy, the bride being veiled both wearing crowns, which are several times exchanged during the cere-

mony. The officiating minister is not a priest, nor necessarily a rabbi but an elder, who, standing under the canopy, holding a cup of blessing, invokes a benediction on the assembly. He gives a cup of wine to the betrothed, who pledge one another. The bridegroom then drains the cup, dashes it to the ground, and crushes it with his heel, a symbol, it is said, that their happiness cannot be without alloy while Jerusalem is in the hands of the heathen. The marriage contract is next read, and attested by each person present drinking of a cup of wine. The friends next walk round the canopy, chanting psalms and showering rice upon the couple. The ceremony is concluded by the elder invoking the seven blessings upon them, drinking the benedictory cup, and passing it round to the assembly. After dark, the bridegroom leads the bride homewards, attended by the friends of each, while others join the procession on its way, bearing hymeneal lamps in token of respect. Arrived at the bridegroom's house all are invited to a feast, which by the rich is repeated for seven nights, or even longer." (*c.f.* Matt 25. 1–13)

Christ attended the marriage celebration at Cana, simply because it was a marriage between his relatives. Mark (the bridegroom) was a nephew of Joseph, and pretty Ruth (the bride) had long been motherless but found solace in Mary's sympathy who regarded her as a daughter.

The fact that Christ declared marriage, a worldly affair, may be proved in his saying. "*The children of this world marry and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage.*"—Luke. 20. 34 & 35. St. Paul does not tell us that marriage is "an Holy estate;" but he says it is honourable in all; be-

cause he knew that it is the joining together of two sinners and not two Angels. What holy inspiration possessed the man and wife who arm-in-arm stepped to and fro the house of God?.

In Nigeria we observe that, before any house of God can be made a house for marriage purposes it must be duly licensed by the Governor; and although such a place of worship can make marriage a "holy estate" etc., yet it has not the power to decide the case of what it has made. The Court has power to grant divorce at the suit of the husband or at the suit of the wife on proof of such crimes recognised by the Court. Then Holy Matrimony, or Holy estate becomes not only unholy but also dishonourable.

Historians do not tell us that Mark (the bridegroom) was that day in Frock-coat and Top-hat, and Ruth in English bridal attire walking arm-in-arm through the courts of the Temple. But that they both wore crowns during the ceremony in the upper room, and that Mark, after dark, "among the youngmen called the children of the bride-chamber in festive attire with a bright turban on his head, as he was about to meet his bride and take her to his father's house, and that Ruth, "clad in white robe clasped round the waist with a beautiful girdle, veiled from head to foot, and on her flowing hair she wore a myrtle crown, and the village maidens round her, sang and played with their timbrels as they joined the procession."

Can the reader tell us what just claim has worldly affair in the House of the Lord? If in *licensed* places of worship, marriage is an holy estate, etc., then the husband has right to assert his conjugal

rights on his spouse in such places licensed for marriage purposes. Licensing a consecrated building, the House of the Lord—certainly not a play-house, is desecrating it; it is rendering it a house for marriage purposes.

The difference between the two is, while the Native marriage celebrated in the house claims the Christian position, the English marriage in the Church claims the contrary.

Rev. S. A. Coker, in his lecture on "*The rights of Africans to organize and establish Indigenous* Churches, unattached to and uncontrolled by Foreign Church *Organisations*" says: "Marriage by geniune Native form and controlled by Native laws can in no way militate against Christianity nor hinder spirituality in its members nor effect any degradation to it. English state laws have reminded the Churches and Missionaries over and over of their encroachment on the laws of Marriage."

Dr. *Blyden* in his "*African Life* and *Customs*" says:—

"Africa solved the marriage question by herself thousands of years ago. It has needed no revision and no ammendment, because founded upon the law of Nature and not upon the *dictum* of any ecclesiastical hierarchy. Europe is still grappling with the problem, and finds that not only is her solution unsatisfactory, but out of it have grown other difficult questions."

Dr. O. Johnson in his "*Christian marriage*" '*a paper read at a church conference at Lagos, in the year* 1902' says:—

"Instead of returning to this subject again and again like a moth to the flame to be scorched, considering the utter impossibility of Christians of all denominations to agree upon what really constitutes "Christain Marriage"—if there be any such as distinguished from the marriage of Two Christains—

Churchmen may as well let it alone as a social, civil, or national question rather than a religious one—especially as the view that is sure to prevail in any case in every country is that which is held legal by the government of that country— since Christendom cannot show a united front on the subject."

In conclusion, let us learn that women are created for men—I Cor. xi. 9.; that it is better to teach them to live together in their husband's house than to build houses for harlotry; that marriage is not a christian institution; and that it ought not to be celebrated in the House of God.

THE END.

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